

Memorandum

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From the Office of the Mayor of Winooski

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To: Winooski City Council & Commissions

At our September 21 Council meeting, we agreed to ask our policy advisory commissions to participate in a [Master Plan](#) progress check. As the Master Plan (adopted in 2019) is our shared roadmap for the next seven years, it is important to regularly revisit this plan and check in our progress, to keep our priorities aligned to and grounded in the community vision.

With our commissions being aligned to the priority areas in the Plan, and their annual workplans drafted to align to Plan priorities, commissions were well positioned to have a discussion about progress to date and future priorities. These discussions were framed with a series of questions:

- Have past and current initiatives been aligned to the policy goals in the Master Plan?
- Are current efforts supporting multiple goals?
- Given that we are only a year into this Master Plan, are there goals we are not currently moving forward on at all? Are these still priorities for the next seven years?
- Do we feel like we're on track towards meeting these goals over time?
- What priorities should future policy focus on in the next year or two? 5 years out?
- Do we as a commission have what we need to succeed? Are we able to make policy advisory decisions that keep us on track towards our master plan and community vision?

At the December 14 meeting of the City Council, councilors reviewed each commission's report and discussed the big picture of progress, upcoming priorities, and ways to better support our commissions. A summary of findings is included on the following page.

Signed,

Kristine Lott, Mayor



Summary of Commission Master Plan Progress Reports

Have past and current initiatives been aligned to the policy goals in the Master Plan?

All commissions responded positively to this question and outlined some specific efforts in their individual reports.

Are current efforts supporting multiple goals?

All commissions answered yes to this question.

Given that we are only a year into this Master Plan, are there goals we are not currently moving forward on at all? Are these still priorities for the next seven years?

Planning and Finance identified goals that haven't been acted on yet, but they felt these goals should be low priority at this time. Municipal Infrastructure and Housing both noted that we haven't focused much work on energy efficiency and weatherization and would be interested in exploring those further should it make sense with City workplans. Safe, healthy, Connected People flagged three goals we could be making more progress on: Expanding access to health care and access to mental health services, Fostering the development of neighborhood identities, and Increasing gender and racial diversity on Staff and Boards to more accurately match the gender and racial make-up of Winooski residents. They did note some effort has been made on these fronts.

Do we feel like we're on track towards meeting these goals over time?

All commissions reported feeling on track, with the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed some efforts.

What priorities should future policy focus on in the next year or two? 5 years out?

Finance

- Focus on Winooski being financially sustainable and affordable
- Continue focusing on attracting employers for our residents, supporting relationships with organizations that can support them, fostering steady planned growth and development, and planning for the TIF revenue.
- Re-visit our Opportunity Zone designation and try to capitalize on this as an avenue to keep growth and development steady as COVID has an impact.

Housing

- A long-term funding model for the Housing Trust Fund as a critical need.
- Identify responses to the impacts of COVID on housing stability.
- Examine the issue of setting targets for bedroom counts alongside unit counts - we seem to lack any tools to support the creation of affordable 2+ bedroom housing.



- Conduct regular monitoring of the impacts of housing policies that have already been implemented as part of the commission's work plan.
- Support changes to zoning to effectively incentivize affordable housing.

Municipal Infrastructure

- Support Main Street and focus on road improvement overall
- Develop Sidewalk repair maintenance prioritization scheme
- Support additional tree plantings and improving urban canopy
- Support implementation of Transportation Master Plan (Pedestrian/bike transportation improvements)
- Support fiberoptic telecom options in Winooski (Burlington Telecom, for example)

Planning

- Continue reviewing and adjusting zoning to ensure that development of the corridors is complementary with surrounding neighborhoods, produces neighborhood scales retail and commercial uses, and includes local historic preservation protections.
- Discuss the protection of our natural areas and open spaces through zoning.

Safe, Healthy, Connected People

- In the near term, assist our neighbors through the pandemic: Public safety services, meals, daycare/after school programming, mutual aid, etc.
- Post-COVID priorities: Expansion of childcare access, increasing gender and racial diversity in city staff, volunteers and elected officials, and establish opportunities for city leaders to develop relationships with a diverse set of our community.

Do we as a commission have what we need to succeed? Are we able to make policy advisory decisions that keep us on track towards our master plan and community vision?

For the most part, commissions feel supported but some suggestions were shared to better support them:

- The Planning Commission didn't feel certain they have the information or tools to truly understand the long-term outcomes of current development to be sure policy is driving us towards our community vision. Similarly, the Finance Commission felt they needed more information to understand the city's broader financial landscape, such as workforce needs compared to employment opportunities compared to housing availability, for example.
- Housing expressed needing more perspective from developers and keeping a connection to the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and their work with other housing commissions in the region.
- Safe, Healthy, Connected People asked that the Council establish priorities for the TIF money (upcoming increase in general fund revenue when the debt for the Downtown redevelopment is paid off)
- They also question if the makeup of their commission (and perhaps other commissions) should be revisited to better reflect our community and the people we serve, for example including youth, parents from the school community, senior citizens and BIPOC members.
- The Municipal Infrastructure Commission expressed a gap in follow up from Council to understand the results and outcomes of their work.



Council Discussion Summary and Next Steps:

City Council and leadership were impressed with how much progress our community has made towards our Master Plan goals only 1.5 years into the plan, and by how our commissioners have supported this work. Council agrees with the priorities set by commissions and these priorities will be referenced as we work through our current budget planning, next summer's policy priorities and strategy setting, and future TIF funds planning discussions. We plan to complete additional progress checks periodically throughout the life of the Master Plan.

To better support our commissions, Council will commit to 3 actions:

1. Council Liaisons will support their commissions in better understanding the commission's role in the goals of their strategic vision area
 - a. Councilors will work with staff liaisons to confirm for commissions where they are the primary commission responsible for the goal versus playing a supportive role to other Commissions, Council and/or staff. For example, Housing Commissions can support the development of zoning updates, but that work would be owned by Planning. And while Safe Healthy Connected People can provide input on programs the city provides to address childcare or food security, this will be a supportive role and the commission is not expected to own the process of developing solutions.
 - b. Councilors review these reports, and their commissions' vision area goals and work with staff liaisons and commission chairs to identify areas of possible cross collaboration. For example, Municipal Infrastructure, Planning and Housing may all play a role in energy efficiency and weatherization policies.
2. Council Liaisons will take a more proactive role in sharing feedback with commissions:
 - a. Councilors should provide an update at each Commission meeting. Councilors are already sharing updates during regular council meetings, so each liaison should take note of those updates and bring them back to commission meetings.
 - b. When commission work and recommendations are presented at Council meetings, Council Liaisons will follow up at the next commission meetings with a summary of related Council discussion and any feedback or next steps, so commissioners know what came of their input.
3. Council will re-visit previous plans to provide equity and inclusion development to all commissioners.
 - a. The Winooski City Council and Leadership Team are committed to bringing more equity into city policies and procedures. We will continue to focus on this as a high priority as we support our diverse community including developing our commissions to become more equitable and diverse.
 - b. We will support all commissions to be able to bring an equity lens into their conversations. This may look like a future workshop or trainings adding an educational component to our commission meetings, and/or inviting in different voices in Winooski to share their stories. Council will have a future discussion about next steps for this work following the wrap up of budget meetings in February with a goal of implementing any training before the June priority planning session.

